

## Wing and A Prayer

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Summary: For once I have a good title! This is a fairy story about... I'm not telling you \*g\*. But it's got some nice bits in it, read if you like your fanfic strange-but-interesting.

## Wing and A Prayer

fire

\_For my brother, who'll most likely never read this, and for Firebolt who already has. Happy Birthday to both of them.\_\*\*

> <br> are you afraid of the fire?/ I am the one who flew/ too near the sun./ burn me. scatter the ashes. /I am not afraid.\*\*

> <br> I've never been frightened of anything: it is my way. A quality that my various babysitters and guardians found universally infuriating.

> <br> I never really had parents: my father was executed by my mother's husband, for reasons which will be obvious if you stop and think about that sentence, and my mother was... destroyed... by the same man. He was a very powerful wizard.

> <br> But things wouldn't have been too bad for me even so: I might have been an orphan but I was a \_royal\_ orphan. My father was only a servant but my mother was a princess. I was never going to starve.

> <br> But as the story I was told so many times in my childhood has it, before he stormed out of the castle the wizard also put a curse on me.

> <br> Determined that love should destroy me as it had him, he proclaimed:

> <br> \_When this boy reaches the age of sixteen, he will die for the love of a woman!

> <br> \_The he laughed: a laugh that said there was no goodness in the world, no justice and no sanity; a laugh that chilled everyone who heard it to the marrow and made them want to crawl into bed and pull up the covers. The First Minister always claimed to have overheard the wizard rehearsing it in his bedroom the night before.

> <br> The words and laughter of the wizard rang from every wall in

the castle, echoed through the dungeons and into the earth, so that before the day was out every blade of grass in the kingdom was aware of the doom that awaited the little prince. And from my royal grandfather down to the grassroots, they gossiped and shook their heads and discussed what a terrible thing this was to happen, and how that there evil wizard should be ashamed of himself, and what on earth could they do?

> <br> My grandfather had an idea what to do. He sent for Gryffindor the Great, widely acknowledged to be the most powerful wizard of the age.

> <br> Gryffindor rode up on his white charger, his perfectly conditioned blond hair streaming behind him in the wind. He had broad shoulders and tree trunk legs and the maids who met him on the way into the courtroom blushed and giggled.

> <br> He bowed elegantly to my grandfather.

> <br> Gryffindor the Great at your service, Your Majesty. Why did you summon me here?

> <br> The young prince has been cursed, explained my grandfather, and related the whole story. Can you help us at all? There must be some way to take the curse off him.

> <br> Gryffindor looked at the sleeping baby prince and shrugged his bearlike shoulders. No, I can't. He's going to die. Deal with it. Just let him enjoy his sixteen years, that's the best advice I can give you. Death isn't really anything to be afraid of.

> <br> GET OUT! shrieked my grandfather with all the rage of majesty thwarted, but Gryffindor had already Disapparated. The First Minister suggested holding his horse hostage, but when they all ran out to the courtyard the horse had disappeared too,

> <br> \*\*in the quiet years, I slept/ in the heart of a volcano, /and drank from the fire./ I had no name, and no memory

> <br> \*\*The First Minister had another cunning plan.

> He can't die for the love of a woman if he doesn't <em>know</em> any women, can he? crowed the Minister triumphantly.

> The Second Minister was female and talented and beginning to gain power in the administration. She was turned out of the palace that evening, along with several hundred of nursemaids, scullery maids, administrators, cooks, and minor members of royalty. It was decreed that I should never meet a woman till I had safely passed my seventeenth birthday.<br>

> I grew up with my grandfather, my tutor, the butler, the grooms and servants who looked after me, and played games with me. I think it was not a bad upbringing; I was less pampered than princes often are. But I was never allowed off the palace estate and it made me a little crazy. Also, I was aware of strange mutterings, an air of discontent among the men around me. There were words like unnatural, shouldn't be allowed in conversations that got cut off as I walked around the corner. I was aware that the dissatisfaction and resentment seemed focused on me: it made me uncomfortable, as if I had committed a crime I didn't know about.<br>

> And of course the mythical spectre of Woman hovered over all. I knew the story of my curse, and I knew that women exercised some unfathomable power over the minds of the other men, that made them fretful and unsettled. Occasionally my servants and teachers would disappear off the estate for a time; they were meeting women, I knew, and I dreaded their tenseness and anticipation and irritability before they went on leave. When they returned they were different; pleased with themselves as if they had slain dragons. From all this I concluded that women were strange dangerous beasts; wild things. I certainly could not imagine loving one.<br>

> This did not change as I grew older, although sometimes in my

dreams I was aware of something lacking. As my body changed and grew, I conceived a passion for one of the stable boys. He had thin white hands and golden curls, but he was sent away when my tutor discovered us and reported it to my royal grandfather. <br>

> I sulked for a time after that, and withdrew into myself. I spent my time hunting dragons, but they were bred in captivity and released into the wild woods of the palace estate only to be hunted down again. They were easy prey and unsatisfying. The paeans of praise which met my every hunting effort made me feel ill; I spent more and more time in the woods, not even hunting, just walking.<br>

> <strong>ripped from the furnace, I had shape again./ I am collared and christened, but/ once I was part of the fire.

> <br> \*\*I was walking in the woods one day, avoiding the trail of small forest fires left by one of our dragons who was less skilled than usual in the arts of camouflage and concealment, I saw something interesting. Startling and interesting enough to awake me from my sullen mood of depression. The most beautiful thing I'd ever seen; a single glance wholly erased the stableboy from my fickle memory.

> <br> He was crouched down picking blackberries from a low-growing bush. He had a face that was delicate, almost heartshaped. Large eyes set in skin of startling purity and clarity, that I instantly wanted to touch. There was something odd about his forehead, too. I had never seen hair so fine, that grew in quite that way, before.

> <br> Are you real? I said.

> <br> I had never seen anything like this before. Surely he was too beautiful to be true? He had a delicate, ethereal quality that made me think of a sprite or a faery. He jumped, startled like a deer, and stood up to face me.

> <br> His shape-- my God-- his shape. Reason told me he was deformed in some strange way, but... he was wearing a woollen shift that clung close to his skin, that showed curved and delicate lines that had featured in certain hazy, hard-to-hold-onto night dreams of mine. He was so slight and delicate, and yet swollen in places that...

> <br> I realised.

> <br> Are you a woman? I said.

> <br> She laughed at me, and it was a beautiful sound. Of course I'm a woman-- are you the prince? Her voice was music, my whole body quivered at the sound.

> <br> I turned and ran away, frightened and embarrassed at the intensity of my reaction to the stranger. Her laughter followed me.

> <br> \*\*once I was part of the fire: /I carry it still within me./ sometimes I go/ back to my heart, /and there are no beginnings,/ no ends, no names.

> <br> \*\*But I went back the next day of course, I couldn't keep away. Have you ever found something like that, that horrified you and turned your world upside down and still pulled you towards it as if you were falling? It made me dizzy and ill, I couldn't think of anything else.

> <br> I pretended I was hunting, but I spent very little time doing so. We stalked the dragons together and caught them quickly. I cut off the creature's heads to display at the palace that evening, proof of a day productively spent, but I spent the whole time with her.

> <br> She was always in the same place when I went to look for her. I didn't know where she lived and it never occurred to me to ask. I thought she was a creature of the woods, a predator from her hunting skills.

> <br> I remember the strange noise she made the first time I told her I was hunting dragons. A chirruping, sweet little song, and the

dragon blundered right into the clearing.

> <br> It's their mating call, she told me, and I swung my sword and beheaded the beast. She pulled me down into a pool of blood on the ground, laughing her bewitching, unique laugh.

> <br> \*\*they call me Fawkes, /but I am fire,/ dancing through life as you. /How could Fawkes be these feathers?/ Feathers fall, and Fawkes is a trick...

> <strong>

> We were caught in the autumn, because I could not concentrate on History: my arrays of dead ancestors held no allure compared to the warm, living, animal present. My tutor became suspicious and followed me into the woods one day. <br>

> He was amply rewarded for his suspicion when he found us sleeping in each other's arms. He pulled me away like a child who's crawled too close to the fire: it took all his strength even though he had the advantage of surprise. I fought him hard. I was enraged like a child, that he could want to separate me from this beautiful thing I had found. But my tutor was a wizard, and he immobilised me where I lay with his magic.<br>

> She summoned a dragon while we fought, I think as a distraction for my tutor. She knew I wasn't going to be afraid of it, I had killed too many. But this one was bigger and stronger than usual, and the woods were full of dried leaves, that caught fire when the dragon panicked.<br>

> I screamed as the fire burned around her, as she too lay helpless. The magician picked up branches and threw them on the fire that burned around her, and she couldn't move. He muttered some words under his breath, and the fire burned brighter and the flames rose higher.<br>

> He turned to me, and his face was different: thinner and paler and black-bearded. It was I who shaped your destiny; who laid the curse on you in the beginning. I had to stick around to make sure it was fulfilled of course, not many people can lay a curse sixteen years in advance and expect it to stick without a bit of nudging. But I have a good idea what's going to happen as soon as I take the Body-Bind off you. The flames rose higher, leaping and crackling next to him, They blistered my face where I lay but he was unaffected. I could see her shape among the flames, and hear her screaming.<br>

> He waved his wand and I could move again. I crawled towards the fire, blind, unthinking, knowing only that I had to rescue her, that i had to prevent the most beautiful thing in the world from being destroyed.<br>

> The fire burned me and I screamed along with her, but I kept crawling.<br>

> Darkness overwhelmed me, and I was part of the fire.<br>

> The fire cooled and died, and the ground was covered in ash. I rose from the ashes, spiralling high into the air, stretching my wings, plunging low as I dared and pulling myself back out of the fall just in time. I was reborn from the fire: and that was the first time I learned to fly.<br>

> <strong>Reborn each instant, here is my prayer. /Grant me no mercy, /spare me no suffering. /Let me live /and let me burn.

> <br> \*\*\_a/n. It's a terrible, terrible curse to be born with poetic leanings, a cynical-verging-on-nasty sense of humour, and a more or less merciless critical eye. It leads to writer's block and whiny a/n's among other complaints.

> This will make more sense if you've read <em>Dream On</em>, but it's not necessary. Comments and criticisms appreciated. If you have anything \*\*intelligent, interesting or complimentary\*\* to say there's a space down there to say it in. I tried to write an unwriteable

experience here, in the bold parts. I failed of course, but I'd like to know what I did write. Thanks to Musketeers for their comments, esp. Blaise who beta-read. \_

End  
file.